LEVELS OF LIVING

Caste is an important and rigid determinant of division of labour. Under this system several occupations have been preserved as caste monopolies, while some are 'open' and may be adopted by persons belonging to all castes. This system of division of labour by occupation has been examined at some length in Chapter III.

The factors of sex, age and social status govern the division of labour in nearly all types of work in the community. First, 'masculine' and 'feminine' pursuits are clearly distinguished: a woman doing man's work is laughed at; a man undertaking any specifically feminine tasks provides a favourite theme for popular gossip. Household work, agricultural activities, traditional craft or occupation of the family, and socio-religious rites and ceremonies are all marked by division of work on the basis of sex.

The age factor is equally important, but not so rigid. Six basic age divisions are recognized in the society: (i) 'Infant' from birth to weaning. (ii) 'Child' from weaning to about twelve. (iii) 'Grown-up boys or girls' from twelve until marriage or even a year or two later. (iv) 'Grown-up people' from twenty to about thirty-eight. (v) Middle-aged from about thirty-eight to fifty. (vi) 'Aged', over fifty. Each of these age divisions carries with it a more or less recognized status which determines the nature and quantity of work to be done by the individual in question. Only in the lower strata of the community we find the 'child' burdened with a regular share in domestic and occupational tasks. The children in the families on upper levels may occasionally do odd bits of work, but no responsibility is thrust on them. As they grow up, girls have to take an increasing interest in domestic tasks. 'Grown-up boys and girls' must seriously start 'learning to do things', and are gradually entrusted with some responsibility. However, it is on the 'grown-up people' that the main responsibility of 'doing all the work' and running the affairs of the household rests. The 'middle-aged' people continue to do a part of the practical work; but their time is more occupied by planning, direction and supervision. Depending on their age and personality, the 'aged' continue to supervise and direct the work of the younger members. As they grow older they content themselves merely by giving suggestions and eventually retire from active work or its planning, and devote their time mostly to their grandchildren.

Considerations of general social status also determine the nature